



Testimony before Joint Ways and Means Committee
On ODFW Budget

3-13-19

Co-Chairs Taylor and Reardon, Members of the committee.

My Name is Bruce Polley. I live in Sherwood, Oregon and I am a volunteer with the Coastal Conservation Association of Oregon (CCA). I am testifying before you today to request state funding for removal of Sea Lions from the Lower Columbia River and its tributaries. At Oregon's request, Congress recently passed S. 3119 to give northwest states and tribes streamlined removal authority.

Sea Lions became protected in 1972 with the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA). Along with the whales and dolphins. Since then the population of California Sea Lions on the west coast has increased from about 100,000 to around 350,000. To a level where many experts think they are at maximum capacity on the West Coast.

Just 15 years ago it was quite rare to see them in our rivers a hundred miles or more up from the ocean. In places like Oregon City at the falls where salmon and steelhead are bottle necked into fish ladders making them easy prey. Now there are dozens there with some never leaving. Even preying on salmon and steelhead up small tributaries like the Clackamas and Sandy where these fish are trying to spawn.

CCA first testified in the Oregon Legislature about sea lions in 2009 when Dave Hunt was Speaker of the House and we were asking for funds for ODFW to observe sea lions feeding on salmon and steelhead below the falls - a baseline requirement to document the problem and gain limited removal authority under the MMPA.

In 2015, The Columbia River Treaty Tribes joined with CCA to support federal legislation that would modify the Marine Mammal Protection act to streamline removals from our rivers and spawning areas and give the salmon and steelhead a chance to pass through these choke points.

In 2017, ODFW released a study that endangered wild winter steelhead at Willamette Falls had a "90% chance of extinction" if nothing was done to remove sea lions.

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There has recently been more and more sea lion predation on White Sturgeon both near Bonneville Dam and at the Falls In Oregon City. These spawning female sturgeon are between 20 and 80 years old. Special sanctuary areas have been set aside where even catch and release fishing has been halted to give these amazing fish a chance to spawn. But sea lions now see these area as providing an easy meal.

We have worked closely with ODFW staff and our elected officials and partners to raise awareness of this crisis. About \$250,000 was swept out of the Columbia Basin Endorsement fund to begin the limited removals in Oregon City last year. These are funds paid by sport anglers for the removal of gillnets from the mainstem lower Columbia River.

ODFW now has this new authority, but no funding to increase removals, which is badly needed as we still have predation going on in all of the tributaries and the areas downstream of the falls and Bonneville. The new federal law allows expanded removals, less costly restrictions, and opportunities to partner with the tribes.

But this new authority has not yet been funded. We feel that it is crucial to fund this program through ODFW so they can work with other state and tribal managers to begin these needed removals. We do not think however that it should be the responsibility of sport anglers to pay for this new federal law and to save an iconic Oregon species from extinction.

Funding for this program was in the ODFW budget request but was removed by the Governor.

We ask this committee to provide \$488,000 per biennium for this crucial program through general funds and save endangered fish from this un-natural level of predation, before it is too late.

Thank you for your time today and I would be happy to answer questions that you may have.

Bruce Polley
CCA-Oregon